

A Study Guide for the Communist Manifesto

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels

WORKINGMEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

~~WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!~~

The two slogans given above are significant not only for their content, but for the evolution of their content as well. The first slogan is the last sentence of Marx and Engel's The Communist Manifesto. The latter slogan appears in many of the publications of the Foreign Language Press of the People's Republic of China. The change is recognition of the leading role of women in the creation of revolutionary society and a concrete example of approaching the study of the Communist Manifesto as a living guide to action rather than as only a historical document or dead dogma.

I. Bourgeois and Proletarians

"By bourgeoisie is meant: the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage-labor; by proletariat, the class of modern wage-laborers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labor power in order to live." Engels

The Communist Manifesto contains basic principles and application of those principles to conditions at that time. Our task is to apply those principles to the concrete conditions of today. Try to think of concrete examples from your own experience.

Principle: The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production (tools, machines, etc.) This creates constant changes in people's relations to one another in the process of production. These changes in relations are beyond the control of the bourgeoisie and they call forth changes in the whole social system which are also beyond the control of the bourgeoisie.

- Questions:
1. What changes have taken place in the instruments of production in the last 50 years? Currently?
 2. What changes have taken place in the relations of production in the last 50 years? Currently?
 3. What changes in social conditions and social systems have occurred as a result of these changes?

Principle: The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly expanding the markets for its products, that is, by exploitation of world markets.

Questions: 1. Give examples of this expansion and exploitation.

2. How has expansion and exploitation been confronted in recent history.

Principle: The bourgeoisie compels nations to adopt the bourgeois mode of production. In a word it creates a world after its own image.

Questions: 1. What examples of this forced adoption of bourgeois made production can you see in the world today?

2. Give examples of "creating a world in its own image."

Principle: As the means of production has been centralized, property is concentrated in a few hands. The necessary consequence is political power in a few hands.

Question: How is this principle evident in today's world?

Principle: Crises especially crises of overproduction are unavoidable in bourgeois society. These crises are resolved in 3 ways: 1) by forced destruction of a mass of productive forces, 2) by conquest of new markets, and 3) by more thorough exploitation of old markets.

Question: Can you see examples of these crises and their resolution in today's world? Give examples.

Principle: In proportion as the bourgeoisie, that is, capital is developed in the same proportion is the proletariat developed. With the centralization of the means of production, there is a corresponding centralization of the proletariat. As a result the proletariat is organized as a class and hence as a political party.

Question: How is this relationship reflected in this country?

Principle: Of all the classes struggling against the bourgeoisie the proletariat alone is the only really revolutionary class.

Question: Why is this true?

Principle: As contradictions intensify various classes behave differently:

1. a small portion of the ruling class goes over to the proletariat
2. the fractions of the middle class fight to save their interests, that is, side with the bourgeoisie, a few desert to the proletariat
3. the lumpen proletariat are generally tools of reaction, a few are swept into the proletariat.

Question: Can you see this process occurring now?

Principle: All previous ruling classes have subjected society to one form or another of exploitation as a means of gaining wealth. The proletariat cannot gain control of their own lives and livelihoods without abolishing all the kinds of exploitation designed to produce wealth for a few.

Principle: All previous historical movements were movements of or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious independent movement of the immense majority in the interest of the immense majority.

Principle: Stages of development of the proletariat: 1) veiled civil war within existing society, 2) open revolutionary war, and 3) violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat.

Principle: The bourgeoisie is unfit to rule because unlike previous ruling classes it is incompetent to assure the existence of the ruled. Rather than being fed by the proletariat it must feed it.

Question: How is this reflected in conditions today?

"Communists disdain to conceal their aims. They openly declare that their ends can be obtained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing conditions."

II. Proletarians and Communists

A. Communists are not in opposition nor do they have interests or principles apart from other working class parties or the proletariat as a whole.

B. Communists are distinguished from other working class parties only in that: 1) in national struggles of proletarians of different nationalities they point out the common interests of the entire proletariat, and 2) in the stages of class struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie they always represent the interests of the movement as a whole.

C. The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are not based on ideas or principles that have been invented or discovered by universal reformers. They express in general terms actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes.

D. The distinguishing feature of communism is not the abolition of property in general but bourgeois property. Property whose accumulation is based on exploitation of wage labor, exploitation of the many by the few.

Property in its present form is based on the antagonism of capital and wage labor. Yet capital is a collective product, a result of the labor of many. Capital is therefore not a personal but a social power. In bourgeois society living labor is but a means to increase accumulated labor (capital). In communist society accumulated labor is used to promote the existence of the laborer.

Bourgeois ideas, laws, culture spring from the conditions of bourgeois production and property. People's ideas, views, conceptions, and consciousness change as their material conditions change. The ruling ideas of each age have been the ideas of its ruling class.

Communist revolution, the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie, replaced a mode of production that is based on exploitation with a mode based on free association. Hence it changes the material basis for a person's consciousness.

III. Socialist and Communist literature.

1. Reactionary Socialism.

A. Feudal Socialism: Literary criticism written by various elements of the feudal aristocracy which in essence criticized the bourgeoisie for creating a revolutionary proletariat.

B. Petit Bourgeois Socialism: a form of socialism common in France which while accurately portraying the conditions of bourgeois production and property (monopoly control) wished only to return to the conditions existing before bourgeois control of production and property, that is, petit bourgeois conditions of production and property.